

**"Ethics and the Culture of Development:  
Building the Sustainable Economy"**

**Havana, Cuba    May 31-June 6, 1998**

**Final Report to Canadian Donors**

**October 1998**

**Summary**

The conference "Ethics and the Culture of Development: Building the Sustainable Economy" was held as planned in Havana, Cuba from May 31 to June 6, 1998. Over 300 people participated, drawn from 32 countries. The Canadian contingent of 10 people included specialists in economics, politics, education, ecology, development studies, and human rights, reflecting a diversity similar to that in the group as a whole. The conference provided an opportunity to exchange ideas and experiences about the best ways of building an economy that is socially just and ecologically sound. Participants heard and debated presentations by 50 resource people in plenary sessions and workshops, organized around four different themes. The final statement ("Sense of the Conference"), issued on the last day, called for a transformation of industrialism in order to create a sustainable economy guided by the principles of social equity, economic prosperity, environmental responsibility, and cultural authenticity. Many bilateral and multilateral relationships were formed among the participants. Follow-up activities include an electronic communications network in Cuba, an international web site with useful documentation, and a series of workshops planned for 1999 on specific themes emerging from the conference. Evaluations reflected a high degree of satisfaction amongst the participants, with 90% saying their expectations had been met.

**Original Objectives**

The objectives of the conference were to:

- exchange experiences among people from different countries interested in promoting a new, more participatory paradigm of development that incorporates the social and ecological dimensions.

- assess and evaluate experiences with the sustainable economy in various countries and regions, and critically review the theory and practice of economic, social, and cultural development.
- formulate a program for building the sustainable economy, including principles, possible actions and practical examples.
- identify ideas, projects, and initiatives for strengthening and expanding the sustainable economy in the industrialized North and the developing South.

## Implementation

The Centro Félix Varela (CFV) hosted the conference, with help from other Cuban organizations and the UNESCO Office for Latin America and the Caribbean. The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) organized the event with CFV, and a group of international co-sponsors from Europe and Canada, including the Canadian Friends Service Committee (CFSC), helped find international funding and participants.

To facilitate discussion, the conference was organized around four main themes, which also defined the conference working groups. :

1. Building a Sustainable Economy: the Role of Enterprises and the Market
2. Ethics and Sustainable Development: the Role of Science and Technology
3. Education and Culture for a Sustainable Civilization
4. Social Movements, Government Initiatives and the Right to Sustainable Development

The program consisted of three very full working days organized successively around three areas: conceptual frameworks, examples of success and directions for the future. Each morning began with several plenary presentations designed to stimulate discussion in the four working groups, which met simultaneously during the day. The working groups each had two, or sometimes three, brief presentations by invited resource persons and then entered into dialogue to deepen the discussion on that particular theme. The plenary and working group sessions were conducted with simultaneous translation in Spanish and English. The methodology was designed to encourage broad participation, with each group expected to reach conclusions and make recommendations insofar as possible in the limited time available.

Evenings of the first four days of the conference were devoted to "open spaces", a marketplace of ideas wherein participants in the conference could organize sessions around a theme, an idea, or a project, inviting all those

interested to participate. About forty such sessions were offered, including the following:

- Gender and Sustainability in Development
- Foreign Debt
- Higher Education: Roles and Responsibilities in Creating the Sustainable Economy
- Societal Impact Matrix—a Paradigm for Sustainable Society
- Building Community Leadership: Cultural and Educational Influences
- Roundtable discussion of organic agriculture in Cuba
- Creating a Socially Responsible Business

The fourth day of the conference offered visits to both rural and urban projects in and near Havana which demonstrate principles and practices of sustainable development. The fifth and final working day of the conference featured a closing speech by Ricardo Alarcón, head of the Cuban National Assembly, and closing reflections by Nobel Peace Prize honoree, Adolfo Pérez Esquivel of Argentina. There was a reading of the final "Sense of the Conference" resolution, which affirmed the fundamental ideas of the conference and included the assignment of responsibilities for follow-up. An optional visit to a Cuban biosphere reserve attracted a number of the participants on Saturday, June 6.

In Cuba, the Félix Varela Center, assisted by the Martin Luther King Center and other institutions, pulled together the large Cuban representation which, very importantly, drew ample participation from the provinces—persons who do not often have an opportunity to attend conferences of this type. These institutions made arrangements for the conference facilities, developed the methodology, recruited facilitators and recorders, contracted translators, and assembled volunteers to assist with the logistics.

More than 300 participants from 32 countries attended the conference (150 from Cuba, 100 from the United States, and the remainder from other countries). Of these 50 resource persons, leaders in their respective fields, came from Cuba, the United States, Canada, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean. They ranged from environmental educators, socially responsible business persons, energy experts, NGO and civil society sector advocates and organizers, to economists, human rights activists, and theologians. Many are multidisciplinary in their work, whether from government, academia, NGO or private sectors.

The Canadian delegation of 10 people included the following specialists who served as resource people in their respective theme areas:

- Laurie Wiseberg, Director of Human Rights Internet (Ottawa).
- Rev. Bill Ryan, Director of the Jesuit Project on Ethics in Politics (in Ottawa) and author of a book published by IDRC entitled *Culture, Spirituality, and Economic Development*.
- Gerald Caplan, specialist on education (co-chair of Ontario's Royal Commission on Learning), historian, and frequent media commentator (Toronto).
- Patricia Lane, environmental scientist at Dalhousie University (Halifax) and author of a forthcoming book entitled *Cuba: The First Sustainable Society of the 21st Century*.

During the week of the conference, CFSC arranged a separate meeting for the Canadian delegates at the Canadian Embassy in Havana.

### Evaluation

A preliminary evaluation completed by the participants at the end of the conference revealed that approximately 90% felt their expectations had been met. Further evaluation by the Coordinating Committee noted the following positive aspects of the conference:

- creative, inter-disciplinary exploration of the elements for building a sustainable economy, including the application of ethical principles such as social equality, economic prosperity, environmental responsibility and cultural authenticity;
- vigorous discussion of challenges and prospects from both North and South perspectives, including analysis of neoliberal policies and practice, the effects of the foreign debt on sustainable development, violence and social chaos affecting many societies, and ecological destruction;
- ample opportunity for building cooperative relationships among persons and organizations of many countries (but particularly between Cuba and the US and other countries) for academic and informational exchanges as well as for planning concrete sustainability projects;
- the setting of Cuba for the conference, both for seeing the challenges Cuba faces and for the creative responses of its society in aspects of sustainability;
- a clear mechanism for follow-up;
- for Cuban participants, a first opportunity to assemble the key actors in their broad "sustainability" community and to initiate a higher level of cooperation within the country;

- also for Cuban participants, a chance to experience a more participatory model than usual for a conference, one that encouraged frank and open dialogue on issues and proposed projects.


Among points that were problematic:

- in the final weeks before the conference, an inordinate amount of staff time spent struggling to obtain U.S. Treasury Department licenses for travel of US persons to Cuba which seriously limited work on final preparations;
- a funding shortfall in Cuba which limited infrastructure for the event—e.g. no on-site computers, printers or copiers and insufficient slide and projector equipment;
- some methodological problems within the working groups, including insufficient time for introductions.

For the Centro Félix Varela, hosting this conference successfully in a collaborative and constructive way with other governmental and non-governmental organizations, served to strengthen the position of NGOs in Cuba, and to promote the inclusion of ethical and cultural considerations in the development process.

### Follow-up Activities

There are several preliminary agreements for follow-up:

- 
- The AFSC will post conference proceedings on its website [www.afsc.org/cubahome.htm](http://www.afsc.org/cubahome.htm), in order for attendees from around the world to have access to the presentations and the record of the working group conclusions and recommendations. Later, an Internet mechanism for participant dialogue will be established.
  - In Cuba, the Félix Varela Center is preparing the proceedings for publication, expected in January 1999 in Cuba. The center will coordinate information distribution within Cuba.
  - Along with Sustainable Systems, Inc., the AFSC and the Centro Felix Varela will explore publication of a short book synthesizing the key ideas and conclusions of the conference.
  - The three institutions will stimulate and facilitate follow-up activities, including information exchange, educational exchanges, and cooperative projects among participants, mainly, but not exclusively, between Cuba and other countries.
  - There will be consideration of a follow-up gathering within the next three years.

## Financial Reporting

Financial support was obtained in the United States by the AFSC from the Christopher Reynolds Foundation and the General Service Foundation. The AFSC used these funds for organizing and travel expenses, which are the subject of a separate report. In addition, the AFSC Dialogues and Exchanges Program, supported by the German organization EZE, financed the participation of several persons from Asia, Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean.

The Centro Felix Varela (CFV) obtained funding for in-Cuba expenses from several European and Canadian institutions, some of which channeled funds through the CFSC. This report covers Canadian funding obtained by the CFSC from the following sources:

- CAW Social Justice Fund
- InterChurch Action
- International Development Research Centre (IDRC)
- Simons Foundation
- Steelworkers Humanity Fund
- United Church of Canada

The attached expense report of the in-Cuba conference expenses is based on the Spanish-language report prepared by the CFV. Detailed receipts and expenditures by category are available from the CFSC and/or CFV if required.

- Prepared by CFSC, based on documentation from AFSC and CFV  
October, 1998